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Zumwalt, Holloway, and the Soviet Navy Threat

Leadership in a Time of Strategic, Social, and Cultural Change

John T. Kuehn, PhD

Abstract: This article examines the strategic challenges faced by Admirals Elmo Zumwalt and James Holloway as chiefs of naval operations in the 1970s. Zumwalt's charter was to reform the U.S. Navy, but it included a charge to address Navy strategy in the face of a growing Soviet maritime threat. He succeeded, but his successor, Admiral Holloway, who is less known, provided much needed stability for the fleet in the wake of Zumwalt's reforms. Holloway continued to refine the ideas of Zumwalt and Admiral Stansfield Turner that eventually became the maritime strategy of the 1980s. The challenges they overcame provide insights for similar challenges today.

Keywords: Elmo Zumwalt, Soviet Red Banner Fleet, James Holloway, maritime strategy

All of this suggests that we are entering a period of significantly changed relationships in the world, and that many of the comfortable assumptions concerning the ability of American military power to maintain peace and stability, and to assure the protection of our own vital interests around the world may be challenged in the years ahead.

~ Admiral James L. Holloway, Chief of Naval Operations¹

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Admiral James Holloway's words ring as true today as they did when he first penned them for an audience that read the U.S. Navy's unofficial journal of seapower, U.S. Naval Institute's *Proceedings*. Other than technology, the United States faces a similar challenge, except instead of being challenged by the growing fleet of the Soviet Union, today that fleet is the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) of China. His observation about "comfortable assumptions" must strike a resonant chord with those informed about the maritime and security challenges facing the United States today. It seems as if a new "comfortable" assumption, and some not-so-comfortable assumptions, are being revised on almost a daily basis in these troubled 2020s.² Different leaders handle these challenges in different ways, but one key to moving forward is senior leadership. Today's defense and security leaders could learn much from how two CNOs—Elmo Zumwalt and James Holloway—led their Service through a period of naval decline and security malaise much like today. Zumwalt was the innovator, reforming the Navy from the inside out, while serving the function of a minuteman, alerting his nation to the security and technological dangers of a seemingly new age. Holloway followed in support, the man who continued to echo Zumwalt's warnings about the growing danger of the Soviet fleet while bringing stability to the Navy in an attempt to address the "hollow" and somewhat dispirited Service he inherited.

Three Tipping Points

Three tipping points—points in time where the security environment clearly could have been have changed—provide the context to understand the challenges these two admirals faced. The first occurred in October 1962 and represents a tipping point for the Soviet Union and in maritime history.³ That month, the Soviet Union was forced to back down during the Cuban Missile Crisis—in part due to a U.S. naval quarantine of Cuba. The emerging leader of a new generation of Soviet navalists, Admiral Sergey G. Gorchakov, spurred on first by Nikita Khrushchev and then Leonid Brezhnev, now had the political support to build a blue water fleet to challenge the "imperialists" of the U.S. Navy.⁴ Similarly, in 1996, the PLAN had such a moment when the People's Republic of China was forced to tone down its anti-Taiwan rhetoric and military posturing with the election of a more independent-minded government on that island. This was in no small part due to another U.S. Navy fait accompli involving the deployment of two aircraft carrier battle groups (CVBG) by the United States in support of Taiwan.⁵

A third, lesser known, tipping point occurred just after the United States withdrew from Vietnam in accordance with the Paris Peace Accords in 1973. The Yom Kippur War of October 1973, 11 years after the Cuban Missile Crisis, emphasized for all the Services, including the U.S. Navy, that continuing the status quo with a worn-out and "hollow" legacy fleet was not a sustainable strategy in the face of the new precision guided munitions on display in that conflict: radar-guided surface to air missiles (SAMS), antitank guided munitions

(ATGMs), and antiship cruise missiles (ASCMs).⁶ A young LTV A-7 Corsair II pilot deployed during that crisis remembered it vividly, “When the Soviet destroyer turned and opened the missile doors and pointed them at the carrier, we had nothing to counter it.”⁷ It was this tipping point that served as the strategic background as Admiral Elmo Zumwalt turned over the reins of the office of chief of naval operations to his successor the next year, Admiral James Holloway III. The Navy reacted much as the U.S. Army under the leadership of General William E. DePuy did in reaction to the results of the Yom Kippur War. The Army implemented a sustained program of doctrinal reforms to account for the unexpectedly good performance of the Egyptian Army against the Israeli military. This reaction was later reflected in Holloway’s strategy, naval construction, and weapons programs, but the wake-up call occurred on Zumwalt’s watch.⁸ These events also drove the United States Navy to be more inclusive in its strategic planning for localized conflicts in the pre-Goldwater-Nichols era, which did much to move that planning into the area of the geographic combatant commanders.⁹

Given the challenges of the present day—with the similar rise of the People’s Liberation Army Navy of China—reexamining Zumwalt’s and Holloway’s efforts to meet the rising challenge of a large, blue-water Soviet Red Banner Fleet makes sense. The challenges to both CNOs’ leadership skills should be emphasized because both were also dealing with defeat in Vietnam, which both had fought in, as well as massive social changes inside the Navy reflecting those that were rocking larger American society in the turbulent 1960s and 1970s. Zumwalt led change during this transformative period, while Holloway inherited that change, to some degree in an even more challenging period just after the Vietnam War ended.

Zumwalt: Leading Transformation in Changing Times

Admiral Elmo Zumwalt had been in the Navy since before the beginning of the Cold War, serving on destroyers in World War II. He had been mentored by diplomat George F. Kennan, was extremely talented, and considered a “political admiral” by contemporaries such as Admiral Hyman G. Rickover. His familiarity with strategy was of the up close and personal kind, having served as aide to the secretary of the Navy, one of the fathers of Cold War strategy, Paul H. Nitze. Zumwalt’s rising star led him to be appointed to what today would be called a “component command” in Vietnam from 1968 to 1970 of all the naval forces there. His surge in the Mekong Delta—Operation Sealords—had led to operational victory and pacification of the delta region of that nation.¹⁰

Zumwalt’s selection as chief of naval operations by President Richard M. Nixon in consultation with Secretary of the Navy John L. H. Chaffee was based on his reputation for being someone who could make things happen. It was an unprecedented choice, skipping 33 more senior admirals and making Zumwalt the youngest ever CNO at the age of 49. Zumwalt is best remembered for his programs for social change in the Navy and his famous Z-grams, but

equally important, at least to those who appointed him, was his strategic character.¹¹ Zumwalt gave himself 60 days to report on his proposals and reforms to Chaffee. This included an assessment of the future fleet architecture of the Navy in the increasingly constrained budget environment as Vietnam wound down. Zumwalt formed a study group, and although he wanted Captain Worth Bagley to lead the effort, he was still on sea duty. Zumwalt decided to use his fellow “destroyer-man” Captain Stansfield Turner, who was Chaffee’s executive assistant, to lead the strategic study until Bagley became available. He named this effort Project Sixty. Zumwalt told Turner to “write a strategy for the Navy.” When asked by Turner for more “guidance,” Zumwalt said, “You write it, then let me see it.” In Turner’s words, “It was a wonderful opportunity for a young rear admiral [Turner had just been selected to write a strategy with virtually no guidance].”¹²

Turner led the study group and completed it enough to brief it in the CNO conference room to Zumwalt and a number of other flag officers on 26 August 1970. Turner, assigned as president of the Naval War College, then turned the report over to Bagley, who briefed the final report to Chaffee.¹³ Project Sixty’s primary recommendations, however, did not encompass a social revolution. Instead, they dealt with what Admiral John M. Richardson (a former CNO) refers to as “fleet design”—that is the roles and missions for a Navy in the near and long term to address threats to national security.¹⁴ The final report signed by Zumwalt and dated 16 September 1970 indicated that the Navy saw its number one priority in terms of national security as its ballistic missile submarine (SSBN) fleet and its ability to deliver “assured second [nuclear] strike.” It listed the drivers for the new doctrine as “significant changes in the Soviet Threat” with “the Nixon Doctrine [having] effectively raised the threshold at which we [the United States] would commit land forces overseas.”¹⁵

Zumwalt was greatly concerned by what has become known—and is very familiar in our own day—as the “shrinking fleet.” In 1968, the U.S. fleet numbered 1,122 commissioned warships and by 1973 had dropped to 932 ships.¹⁶ Zumwalt blamed dynamics inside and outside the Navy. Some of his blame included the other Services for preventing real growth in the Navy during Korea and Vietnam. They had caused the Navy “to put a disproportionate share of the money [the Navy] did receive into maintaining its capability for [power] projection—its carriers and attack planes, its amphibious vessels, and its ships with weapons for bombardment.”¹⁷ Zumwalt also laid some of the blame on the three “air CNOs” who had preceded him, especially for the degradation in the surface fleet. His studies had found that of the three major tribes in the U.S. Navy, it was the surface fleet that had suffered most since the air CNOs were taking care of carriers and aviation while Hyman Rickover maintained strong support for the most advanced nuclear submarine force in the world.¹⁸

The real sea change in the document, though, had to do with the second priority. Zumwalt, Turner, and Bagley had moved “Projection of Power Ashore” behind “Control of Sea Lines [of communication, SLOC] and Area,”

which now became the second priority. This change was clearly driven by the articulation of the Nixon Doctrine's focus on forward maritime, air, and revitalized nuclear presence instead of "land forces overseas." Especially important was sea control and the assurance of the free flow of trade and positioning of the Navy and Marine Corps conventional forces for emergent crises.¹⁹ Sea control is a subset of command of the sea and allows a nation, through use of naval forces, to control the sea for use by its forces and friendly maritime commerce. He stressed that the antisubmarine warfare (ASW) mission that made up the bulk of the sea control mission had suffered due to the neglect of the surface fleet.

Zumwalt's movement of sea control to second priority reflected his attitude that one must fight wars with the Navy one has, and he strongly felt that the U.S. fleet was not in a position to protect the SLOCs to North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) allies across the North Atlantic. He first focused on the design and structure of the Navy to fight the type of war he thought most likely with the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) if deterrence through assured second strike failed, which was a conventional war to protect SLOCs between North America and Europe.²⁰

Zumwalt's proposed solution for the design of the fleet became known as the "high-low" mix. He stated this methodology as follows:

In sum, an all-high Navy would be so expensive that it would not have enough ships to control the seas. An all-low Navy would not have the capability to meet certain kinds of threats or perform certain kinds of missions. In order to have enough ships and good enough ships there had to be a mix of high and low.²¹

Interestingly, this methodology served as the basis for three congressionally mandated studies in 2016 on fleet architecture.²² Zumwalt's approach gave birth to the *Perry* frigate and *Spruance* destroyer classes that became mainstays for the sea control fleets of the late Cold War and for long after. But these new ships were still years out from joining the fleet in significant numbers. Another key initiative accelerated the shrinking of the fleet because Zumwalt, due to budget realities, also decommissioned older, expensive-to-maintain surface ships as bill payers for his programs. The Navy had to shrink to get better—something that seems counterintuitive. In this, his actions reflected those of Admiral Sir John Arbuthnot Fisher 70 years earlier—except Zumwalt had no dreadnoughts for the high-end balance.²³ These decommissionings further cut into the forces he felt he needed for the sea control mission. His other initiative to try to update the old concept of the ASW aircraft carrier (CVS) that never got off the ground other than a proof of concept using an older amphibious ship. The ships were initially designed to be large sea control ships with aviation, eventually becoming the fleet command and control ships USS *Blue Ridge* (LCC 19) and *Mount Whitney* (LCC 20).²⁴

All Zumwalt's efforts, complicated enough in peacetime, occurred in an environment bordering on cultural revolution, during a time of war for his first two years, and in a period of declining budgets and a shrinking fleet. This revolution was the more famous (or infamous) element of Zumwalt's tenure and involved personnel policy reforms that he instituted with his "Z-Grams." These involved women attending the Naval Academy and the opening up of previously restricted jobs in the fleet for minorities and women.²⁵ The occurrence of the 1973 Arab-Israeli War (the Yom Kippur War) affected Americans' daily lives more than Vietnam due to the oil embargo, which caused massive fuel shortages. It came in Zumwalt's last 18 months as CNO and added a level of uncertainty to all these other factors, challenging his leadership and that of his successors and contemporaries. However, the shock of that war was the performance by the Egyptian Army against the vaunted Israeli military, which initially was savaged by precision-guided munitions in the Sinai and along the Suez Canal. Additionally, the crisis led the United States to go to its highest level of alert for nuclear war since 1962 and led to frightening confrontations by the energetic Soviet Navy in the Eastern Mediterranean as relayed in the vignette discussed earlier.²⁶

In 1971, prior to the 1973 war, Zumwalt had already assessed the Navy's chances of winning a conventional war at sea at 45 percent. By the time of the drafting of the fiscal year (FY) 1973 budget (in 1972), it was down another 10 percent. During the period from 1966 to 1970 the Soviets had built twice the number of ships as the United States had, and Zumwalt assessed that fleet as being larger (although most of the warships were smaller vessels) as early as 1971. Zumwalt later said in an interview in 1987 that the United States would have lost a war at sea with the Soviets on his watch and during that of the next two CNOs, James Holloway and Thomas Hayward.²⁷ Analysis of the actions of antiship cruise missile (ASCM) equipped craft in both the Indo-Pakistani War of 1971 and the 1973 war caused Zumwalt to accelerate the acquisition of ASCMs for the Navy for the Harpoon program, which had begun in 1969. The Navy bought its first 150 Harpoon missiles the year Zumwalt retired in 1974.²⁸

Zumwalt's concerns vis-à-vis the Soviets were also shared by General William DePuy, the U.S. Army's Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) commander. The 1973 Arab-Israel War seemed to confirm both men's belief that warfare had changed—on land and at sea. The weapons and doctrine that the Soviets provided Egypt shocked Israel and the world.²⁹ When Zumwalt left the position of CNO in 1974, he was remembered for his sweeping social and cultural changes to the Navy, not for his efforts to refocus the U.S. Navy for Cold War conflict with a growing and dangerous Soviet Red Banner Fleet. He should have been. Zumwalt's efforts in this regard have been lost to history, even though Project Sixty and his ideas about sea control in the Atlantic were the first items on his agenda when he took over as CNO.³⁰

James Holloway: Inheriting Transformation in Changing Times

James Holloway III, the son of an admiral, was Zumwalt's classmate at the Naval Academy and also served in combat in World War II, receiving a bronze star for action during the 1944 Battle of Leyte Gulf aboard surface ships. He went on to become a naval aviator and earned a Distinguished Flying Cross (DFC) and three air medals in combat during the Korean War. He commanded the United States' first nuclear powered aircraft carrier, USS *Enterprise* (CVN 65), nicknamed "Big E," on its combat deployment to Vietnam, where it supported the Operation Rolling Thunder air campaign against North Vietnam. Holloway later commanded the U.S. Seventh Fleet, stationed in Japan, during the so-called Easter Offensive by North Vietnam in 1972 that resulted in the air campaigns known as Linebacker I and II. Linebacker I—which saw the use of precision-guided weapons by U.S. air forces on a large scale for the first time as well as the first American suppression of enemy air defense campaign against a sophisticated air defense system—was a critical factor in preventing the collapse and conquest of South Vietnam by the mechanized armies of North Vietnam that year.³¹

The challenges Holloway faced were equally as daunting as those faced by Zumwalt. True, the Vietnam War was over, but all the factors that had made Zumwalt's job so difficult were still in play: a declining budget, a shrinking fleet, a growing Soviet naval threat, and what has become known to American history as the post-Vietnam "hollow force," including the Navy. Some of this had to do with Zumwalt's sweeping personnel changes that many naval officers viewed as having undermined the morale and good order and discipline of the fleet.³² At the same time, the American public was decidedly ambivalent about the Navy, and with the elimination of the draft the Navy now had a harder time than ever recruiting the highly skilled people it needed for its high-tech ships, aircraft, and systems.

Holloway was a reliable steward for the Navy, however his leadership provided much-needed stability during a period when détente with the Soviet Union seemed an established fact. Nonetheless, as the U.S. fleet shrank and the Soviet fleet grew, Zumwalt pointed out the growth in the Soviet Navy as he took over, emphasizing its ability to provide presence at greater levels than the U.S. Navy in the Mediterranean Sea and Indian Ocean, while tripling its number of missile launch platforms from 227 in 1960 to 723 in 1970. Particularly troubling was the growth in the Soviet nuclear-powered submarine fleet.³³ When Holloway took over as CNO, the Soviet fleet had grown further still, surpassing the U.S. Navy in numbers of ships by 1976. Zumwalt's gloomy forecasts had come to pass. Holloway later referenced the danger that Soviet missile platforms had posed in 1973 to U.S. Navy warships on patrol in the Mediterranean during the Arab-Israeli War.³⁴

Meanwhile, the size of the American fleet had dropped to 512 active warships, and by the time Holloway put his FY 1977 budget together for Congress

in 1976, the fleet had dropped to its lowest point since prior to World War II, 477 ships. As discussed, there was still no real maritime strategy beyond the ideas of power projection and a commitment to protect the sea lines of communication across the Atlantic should the Cold War go hot.³⁵ Turner, in his perch at the Naval War College, had described the closest thing to the American maritime strategy in 1974, emphasizing the same elements as Project Sixty with nuclear deterrence through assured second strike, sea control, power projection, and presence. The last three elements, Turner made clear, addressed the track record of the Navy in providing ready forward forces for emergent crises and thus overlapped and supported each other.³⁶ The election of James E. “Jimmy” Carter as president—a naval academy graduate—in 1976 did nothing to change this situation. Carter, a liberal democrat, wanted to continue to cash in a peace dividend from the Vietnam War given the United States’ continuing economic woes with inflation, high interest rates, and the slow growth in income and jobs. Carter would eventually free up funds for the military, but mostly to redress the horrible pay scales that existed for junior officers and the enlisted ranks.³⁷

It was not just the size of the Soviet Navy, but its activities, as 1973 had shown, that caused concern for Holloway and the Navy. Just after the Cuban Missile Crisis the Soviet Navy started conducting regular annual exercises. In 1965, the Soviets conducted a large naval exercise that foreshadowed the later Okean exercises of the 1970s. Okean 1970 and 1975 get more press, but the actual cycle of these large Soviet blue water exercises began in 1965. As the Soviet fleet increased in size to more than 1,000 warships, so too did the size and scale of these exercises. By the 1970s, the numbers of participating ships were in the hundreds. Tactically, the exercises focused on anticarrier warfare as well as on the more traditional areas of submarine and antisubmarine warfare. An off-cycle ASW exercise took place in 1973 and included the forward deployment of submarines beyond Iceland.³⁸

Against this backdrop, the dire situation of the post-Vietnam U.S. military was demonstrated for all to see in the 1975 *Mayaguez* incident, the botched rescue attempt for a ship seized by the Khmer Rouge shortly after Saigon fell to the North Vietnamese Army. This episode highlights how poorly the Services worked with each other and how unsuited they were a bare two years after Vietnam to engage in violent contingency operations.³⁹ Nonetheless, Holloway provided a steady hand at the tiller during this turbulent period. In the words of one author, “He did more than provide stability.”⁴⁰ That “more” included his impact on naval strategy. One can also go to the pages of the U.S. Naval Institute *Proceedings* of that period to find the key elements of Soviet and U.S./NATO strategy. The U.S. strategy might best be termed as a reactive sea control strategy. Its focus was to protect the sea lanes to Europe, thus Zumwalt’s emphasis on sea control. To that end, in the January 1975 issue of *Proceedings*, one can glean more resolution on the strategy from an article by Admiral Hyman Rickover entitled “Nuclear Warships and the Navy’s Future.” Rickover saw that with

Zumwalt's departure and the arrival of Holloway, the time was right to make his case for a predominately nuclear-powered fleet. He emphasized that the growth in the Soviet Navy, the threat to Middle East oil, and the recent Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) oil embargoes underlined the tenuousness of the oil supply and mandated that the United States free itself from fossil fuels with a mostly nuclear fleet and that any new major surface combatant be nuclear powered. He compared the advent of nuclear propulsion with the naval revolution caused by the commissioning of the Royal Navy's dreadnought battleship 70 years earlier. He made a compelling case, in spite of the continuing budget crunch.⁴¹

Holloway, like Rickover, realized that the real battle to support a maritime strategy that saw conflict with the Soviet Fleet in the North Atlantic, if not elsewhere across the oceans of the globe, would involve a public relations campaign to gain congressional support for a more robust Navy budget. To that end, he leveraged the readers of *Proceedings* the following June 1975 in the section known as "The President's Page" (the CNO at that time was president of the Naval Institute), laying out his thoughts as well as his interpretation of the maritime strategy needed to address the Soviet threat. He specifically asked the readership of the Naval Institute to serve as "spokesmen" to the "public . . . about public awareness of a defense budget approaching one hundred billion dollars."⁴² This was more than a just a publicity stunt or the pro forma business as usual comments of an incoming Service chief that it might appear to today's more jaded readers. Holloway outlined the major points of the maritime strategy of the mid-1970s for *Proceedings*' readership. He first addressed the budget context, emphasizing how much the budget had been reduced, the plans to reduce it further, and how that negatively impacted the Navy. In other words, the "shrinking fleet" would probably continue to shrink.

His second point was to emphasize that as the United States cut its fleet, the Soviets were building theirs, a situation analogous to that of the United States and China today. He cited (in 1975) that the Soviets spent 50 percent more on their fleet for new ship construction.⁴³ Holloway's third point emphasized that the "U.S. and Soviet trends . . . occurred against a backdrop of shifting power relationships in the world—to which the changing U.S.-Soviet military balance has itself contributed significantly."⁴⁴ In other words, the Soviet increase in military (and maritime) power was changing the geopolitical balance in favor of the Soviet Union. Recall, these words occurred during a period of official détente with the Soviet Union, when U.S. and Soviet ships were visiting each other's ports.

Holloway then turned his readers' attention to the "role of the Navy." He first emphasized that it was the "age of nuclear weapons." This meant that for the Navy maintaining the sea-based leg of the strategic nuclear deterrent was nonnegotiable and that "sea-based missile systems will continue to *increase in importance*."⁴⁵ Second, and presumably second in priority for the Navy, was "to keep our sea lines of communication open." These first two points reflected the

Zumwalt/Turner maritime strategy at the time, which meant a one-ocean Navy focused on the SLOC in the Atlantic. Holloway was having none of it. His third point encompassed the ability to “project U.S. power ashore to protect our vital interests.” Because he had argued in the final of his first three points about “background” and how the changing global “balance” affected those very interests, his point about power projection emphasized the critical role of the fleet beyond the North Atlantic and sea control there; that vital interests encompassed crises that could be met with what he later called “hedgies.” Holloway specifically identified aircraft carriers and afloat Marines on amphibious ships as the principal components for this maritime role.⁴⁶ In sum, Holloway argued that nuclear deterrence, sea control, and power projection should be the basis of the fleet. To some degree he was downplaying Zumwalt’s elevation of sea control to second priority, although it was still a very critical role.

Holloway’s fourth point about the role of the Navy emphasized again his previous discussion of crisis-response type forces for other vital interests beyond Western Europe. “Fourth, perhaps the most important mission of the navy for the era of peace we seek is . . . overseas presence. The existence of our Navy demonstrates to those who would deny us free use of the seas that hostile challenges to our interests, or those of our allies, may result in a confrontation with U.S. armed forces.”⁴⁷ The headlines had only just emphasized this point with the recent *Mayaguez* incident, although Holloway did not mention it specifically. He went on to expand on this theme and specifically mentioned the Mediterranean—where World War III almost started in October 1973—as well as the Western Pacific and Indian Oceans (where an Indo-Pakistani War had recently concluded). He closed this section of his discussion by returning to the global nature of the Soviet Fleet, and the fact that even the Caribbean, seemingly safe since the Cuban Missile Crisis, was now host to Soviet naval deployments to Cuba and that Soviet ships circled Hawaii and cruised home along the Alaskan littoral. All of this went to his emphasis that “it is essential to reverse the declining trend of our naval force levels.” He specifically cited the current level of 490 warships for the coming fiscal year as “an historic low which takes us below the figure of 1939, two years before Pearl Harbor.”⁴⁸

Holloway then emphasized the need to focus on two major issues. First, a strategy needed to be devised and explained to Congress. He expected his readers to do so, using his talking points. Second, fleet readiness was the “primary objective” in the near term, reflecting how the “hollow fleet” undermined making the case to the American public. To hammer this point home, his last sentence laid “the responsibility for securing that the public is informed lies in a great measure to the professionals who comprise the membership of the Naval Institute. . . . Press on!” These pages of *Proceedings* read as talking points and commander’s guidance from the top, mustering “all hands on deck” to mobilize Americans to care once again about the value of the fleet to their own security.⁴⁹

In the very same issue of *Proceedings*, the clever editors included a translated open source article by Holloway’s counterpart in the Soviet Fleet, Admiral of

the Fleet Sergey F. Gorshkov, from the Soviet analogue to *Proceedings*, *Morskoy Sbornik*. Gorshkov's translated article from 1974 hammered home Holloway's points about the Soviets, especially the geopolitical ones. It explained clearly why the Soviets were building and challenging the United States outside their traditional near-shore operating areas.⁵⁰ Holloway did not shy away from his own participation in the information campaign to protect the Navy budget. He was quoted in *U.S. News and World Report* as saying, "With declining carrier-force levels, the reappearance of a strong naval adversary, the same overall global commitments, and no forecast diminution in potential trouble spots, the Navy needs a balanced and effective force of surface combatants."⁵¹ All the elements of this 1975 call to arms can be found in Holloway's formal effort to codify a strategy in the "SEA PLAN 2000" study, promulgated by the CNO in 1978.⁵² It identified the aircraft carrier as the centerpiece of his "hedging" strategy for the panoply of vital interests across the globe as well as making clear the value of smaller surface combatants to the presence mission he articulated in June of 1975. Holloway termed this use of naval forces in SEA PLAN 2000 as "the calibrated use of Force against the Shore." The strategy also included discussions of support to allies, especially the protection of NATO allies' SLOCs. Accordingly, Holloway supported the acquisition of more nuclear-powered aircraft carriers and large deck amphibious ships like the USS *Tarawa* (LHA 1).⁵³

However, Holloway did not succeed as much as he would have liked. His plan hinged on a healthy building plan for the Navy beyond nuclear submarines. Things went from bad to worse as the Navy shrank, its readiness continued to plummet, and the Carter administration came close to canceling the construction of the new large nuclear carriers on his watch. These last were central to his hedging strategy approach. Only the deterioration of the world situation with the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan (1980) and the Iran hostage crisis (1979) caused President Carter and Congress to reverse course and belatedly implement many of Holloway's ideas after he had been replaced by Admiral Thomas B. Hayward.⁵⁴

Fair Winds and Following Seas?

The United States, it is now clear, expected a "peace dividend" from Vietnam, even though the Cold War was still underway. Détente had contributed to a certain smugness about the Soviets, but both Elmo Zumwalt and James Holloway pushed back against these attitudes as CNOs of the U.S. Navy. They both understood that "national emergencies cannot be foreseen and must be met by existing forces."⁵⁵ They required warships to do as they were asked. Holloway had presented clear evidence in "SEA PLAN 2000" of the utility and use of naval forces during the 1970s in crisis after crisis.⁵⁶ But warship construction for surface ships remained anemic as the Soviet Navy grew. The similarities of the situation of the U.S. Navy today with those in the period discussed here are eerily familiar. American naval officers today, sailors and Marines, know how Zumwalt, and especially Holloway, might have felt in the 1970s as they faced

the growing might of the People's Liberation Army Navy and its attendant coast guard and naval militias as the U.S. Navy has seen zero real growth for more than a decade.

In the Marine Corps, it is clear the current Commandant, General David H. Berger, is trying to address these concerns, especially regarding the challenges in the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command (INDOPACOM) region. One sign that he is succeeding is the pushback he is receiving from the old guard of the Marine Corps. The threat to sacred cows, and the response of those stakeholders, is one sign that real reform is being considered.⁵⁷ However, David H. Berger still needs maritime lift for his Marines and this will come from the Marines' bigger "blue brother"—the U.S. Navy. The recent submission of the Navy's 30-year shipbuilding plan offers little reason for optimism; it does not include anything approaching Holloway's articulate description of the Soviet naval threat faced in the earlier era. Worse, it lacks any of the sort of clarion calls that Zumwalt and Holloway made in trying to get the nation to reverse course and build up its seapower, instead dressing up its proposals in nearly impenetrable bureaucratic language.⁵⁸

Time may be running out for clarion calls to be of much use. Zumwalt and Holloway stood the watch in lean times, but they did not shy away from clearly outlining the threats, challenges, and shortcomings of the fleet. Instead, they provided pivotal leadership and vision in producing the strategy documents that later became the highly touted maritime strategy of the 1980s while at the same time correcting the course of the fleet toward the future.⁵⁹

Endnotes

1. Adm James L. Holloway III, USN, "The President's Page," U.S. Naval Institute *Proceedings* 101, no. 6 (June 1975): 3.
2. For an example of the latter type of assumption, see the podcast with Michael Kofman et al., "What the Experts Got Wrong (and Right) about Russian Military Power," *War on the Rocks* (podcast), 30 May 2022, 1:00:15.
3. See Peter Swartz et al., *The Navy at a Tipping Point: Maritime Dominance at Stake?* (Arlington, VA: CAN, 2010), 40–42, for a discussion of this term and its definition within the context of naval affairs and maritime dominance.
4. Lise A Rose, *Power at Sea: A Violent Peace, 1946–2006* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2007), 168–69, 183–84; and Kevin Rowlands, ed., *21st Century Gorshkov: The Challenge of Sea power in the Modern Era* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2017), 132–33, 135.
5. J. Michael Cole, "The Third Taiwan Strait Crisis: The Forgotten Showdown Between China and America," *National Interest*, 10 March 2017.
6. George W. Gawrych, *The 1973 Arab-Israeli War: The Albatross of Decisive Victory*, Leavenworth Paper Number 21 (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute, 1996), 20–22, 34–39.
7. Conversation between Capt Robert Rubel and the author, November 2016, at the Naval War College in Newport, RI, as part of the CNO Fleet Design Team. Rubel was formerly the dean of the Center of Naval Warfare Studies at the U.S. Naval War College.
8. For the Army reactions see Paul H. Herbert, *Deciding What Has to Be Done: General William E. DePuy and the 1976 Edition of FM 100–5, Operations*, Leavenworth Paper

- no. 16 (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute, 1988), 25–59; for the Navy, see John B. Hattendorf, ed., *U.S. Naval Strategy in the 1970s: Selected Documents*, Newport Paper no. 30 (Newport, RI: Naval War College Press, 2007), 109–10. The author wishes to thank Capt Peter Swartz, USN (Ret), for bringing this work to his attention.
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10. John T. Kuehn, “US Navy Cultural Transformations, 1945–2017: The Jury Is Still Out,” in Peter R. Mansoor and Williamson Murray, eds., *The Culture of Military Organizations* (Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 364–65, <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108622752>; see also Edward J. Marolda, *Admirals Under Fire: The U.S. Navy and the Vietnam War* (Lubbock: Texas Tech University Press, 2021), chap. 6.
11. Kuehn, “US Navy Cultural Transformations, 1945–2017,” 365.
12. Hattendorf, *U.S. Naval Strategy in the 1970s*, 1–2.
13. Elmo R. Zumwalt, *On Watch: A Memoir* (New York: New York Times Book Co., 1976), 66–80; Larry Berman, *Zumwalt: The Life and Times of Admiral Elmo Russell “Bud” Zumwalt Jr.* (New York: Harper Collins, 2012), 230–32; and Edgar F. Puryear Jr., *American Admirals: The Moral Imperative of Naval Command* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2005), 428.
14. See John M. Richardson, *A Design for Maintaining Maritime Superiority*, version 1.0 (Washington, DC: Chief of Naval Operations, 2016).
15. Elmo Zumwalt, “Memorandum for All Flag Officers (and Marine General Officers), Dated SEP 16, 1970, Subject: Project SIXTY,” in *U.S. Naval Strategy in the 1970s*, 3–5, hereafter Project Sixty.
16. These numbers from Swartz et al., “Tipping Point,” 14.
17. Cited in Frederick H. Hartmann, *Naval Renaissance: The U.S. Navy in the 1980s* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1990), 14.
18. Hartmann, *Naval Renaissance*.
19. Zumwalt, Project Sixty, 5–6.
20. Zumwalt, Project Sixty, 60–63; and Berman, *Zumwalt*, 233.
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22. Adm John M. Richardson, “Chief of Naval Operations Fleet Design Advisory Panel Charter,” memorandum, 23 September 2016. Richardson addresses the three studies in paragraph 3 of this correspondence.
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24. Hartmann, *Naval Renaissance*, 14–16.
25. Kuehn, “US Navy Cultural Transformations, 1945–2017,” 351–64.
26. Gawrych, *The 1973 Arab–Israeli War*, 34–39; and Jonathan M. House, *A Military History of the Cold War, 1962–1991* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2020), 189–95.
27. Hartmann, *Naval Renaissance*, 15–18.
28. Christian H. Heller, “The Impact of Insignificance: Naval Developments from the Yom Kippur War,” Center for International Maritime Security (CIMSEC), 19 February 2019.
29. Herbert, *Deciding What Has to Be Done*, 25–59.
30. For a discussion of the “Zumwalt Revolution,” see Kuehn, “US Navy Cultural Transformations, 1945–2017,” 364–71.
31. Marolda, *Admirals Under Fire*, chap. 4.
32. Kuehn, “US Navy Cultural Transformations, 1945–2017,” 371–72; Marolda, *Admi-*

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33. Zumwalt, *Project Sixty*, 7–10.
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36. Stansfield Turner, "Missions of the U.S. Navy," *Naval War College Review* 26, no. 5 (1974): 2–17.
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40. Hartmann, *Naval Renaissance*, 20.
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42. Holloway, "The President's Page," 3.
43. Holloway, "The President's Page," 3.
44. "Notebook," U.S. Naval Institute *Proceedings* 101, no. 7 (July 1975): 103.
45. Holloway, "The President's Page," 3–4. Emphasis added.
46. Holloway, "The President's Page," 4; and "SEA PLAN 2000," 115–20.
47. Holloway, "The President's Page," 4.
48. Holloway, "The President's Page," 4.
49. Holloway, "The President's Page," 4–5; and James L. Holloway, *Aircraft Carriers at War: A Personal Retrospective of Korea, Vietnam, and the Soviet Confrontation* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2007), 348–49.
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57. Joseph Mozzi, "The Marine Corps and the Naval Campaign: The Necessary Context of Debate," *War on the Rocks*, 7 April 2022.
58. *Report to Congress on the Annual Long-Range Plan for Construction of Naval Vessels for Fiscal year 2023* (Washington, DC: Chief of Naval Operations, 2022).
59. For a discussion of the 1980s maritime strategy and after, see Haynes, *Toward a New Maritime Strategy*, 31–33, 226–29.